

Item 13 – Leisure Operator Options Report

The attached report was considered by the People & Places Advisory Committee on 5 March 2024. The relevant Minute extract is below.

People & Places Advisory Committee (5 March 2024, Minute 42)

Resolved: that under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting when considering the Report and Appendices A and B of Agenda Item 9 above, on the grounds that likely disclosure of exempt information is involved as defined by Schedule 12A, paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information.)

The Chief Officer for People & Places presented the report, which set out the Council's future options regarding the management of its leisure centres in Sevenoaks and Edenbridge, and Lullingstone Park Golf Course. The current interim leisure operator contract for these facilities was due to end in May 2025. Four options were presented to the committee for consideration.

The officer set out why Option 2 was recommended to the committee. The procurement process would ensure the Council received best value for money in the contract, as it would be competitively tested in the market. Operating risk could be transferred to an external leisure operator, who have the expertise and resource to be more commercially focused. A contract service specification would be developed to ensure the facilities were managed against industry best practice.

A five-year (plus two) contract had been selected as it would encourage greater competition and response from the market, not be overly financially burdensome to operators and would allow for feasibility plans to regenerate the leisure centres to come forward.

In response to questions, the officer explained that other operators were not considered for the current interim contract, as the process had to be completed quickly - a variation of contract with the operator of White Oak Leisure Centre was the only mechanism fast enough for the Council's purposes to reopen the facilities to the public in April 2023.

Members were advised that the Council had received contributions from the Swimming Pool Support Fund towards utilities costs, and that a bid for capital investment at White Oak Leisure Centre had been made. Decarbonisation and energy efficiency of the other leisure centres was also a priority.

Resolved: That

- a) The options within the report be noted.
- b) It be recommended to Cabinet that
 - i) Option 2, to proceed with the procurement of a leisure operator contract for Edenbridge and Sevenoaks Leisure Centres and Lullingstone Park Golf Course for 5 years (with an option to extend for a further two years, subject to satisfactory performance) in accordance with the strategy set out in the report, be agreed.
 - ii) Authority be delegated to the Chief Officer, People and Places and Chief Officer, Finance and Trading and Head of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for People and Places and Cabinet Member for Finance and Investments, to conduct the procurement and evaluation exercise.